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# **The Rising Sun of Socialism: The emergence of the Labour Movement in the textile belt of the West Riding of Yorkshire**

**c.1890-1914**

**by Keith Laybourn**

It was E. P. Thompson, in his seminal article 'Homage to Tom Maguire' who, in 1960, reminded us of the value of **provincial history** at a time when historians were still focussing upon **national events**. What he sought was the fusion of local and national history which would permit us to gain a fuller picture of why the radical politics of the North gave rise to the emergence of the socialist organisation the Independent Labour Party. He stressed that the ILP emerged in the provinces of the North, emphasised the importance of the West Riding of Yorkshire in its growth , stressed that whilst the Manningham Mills strike is accredited with the Labour breakthrough that that was an event which owed much to other strikes and other developments, the work of 'gifted propagandists and trade unionists' (p. 279) such as the Leeds-Irish photographer **Tom Maguire**. Yet he recognised that no individual alone was responsible for this change and emphasised that to create a movement which was prepared to break with the past there had to be something wider, indeed it had to be '**the product of a community**' (p. 279)

The textile district of the West Riding was a distinctive **community** which, for a variety of reasons, took rapidly to the new independent Labour cause. From its early successes in winning municipal and local seats in Colne Valley, Bradford and Halifax in the early 1890s it developed to win an increasing number of municipal seats, more than doubling its local representation from 89 (47 municipal) representatives in 1906 to 189 (85 municipal) in 1913, the real breakthrough coming from about **1909**

**onwards.** Up to that time the ILP had challenged the Liberals in their parliamentary seats with candidates such as **Ben Tillett** (Bradford West 1892, 1895), John Lister I (Halifax, 1895 & 1895), Tom Mann (Colne Valley, 1895), Keir Hardie (Bradford East, 1896) and H. Russell Smart (Huddersfield, 1895). In the 1906 general election, however, the local independent Labour movement it had developed to the point of securing three MPs (Fred Jowett, James Parker and James O'Grady) in the 1906 general election and, briefly four from 1907 to 1910, when Victor **Grayson** was returned for Colne Valley. Until 1906 the ILP had been a party of the **municipality** in West Yorkshire but thereafter it was a party also of **national** politics and its **horizons** moved towards **national** perspectives.

The growth of the movement was seen in the success of the *The Clarion*, *Labour Leader* and the *Yorkshire Factory Times* (Andrews, Burgess etc) in the district, the last of these serving the textile workers of the district and bringing together Ben Turner, Allen Gee, W. H. Drew and James Bartley as contributors. Eventually by 1914 there were three local ILP papers – the *Bradford Pioneer*, *The Leeds Weekly Citizen* and *The Worker* (Huddersfield ) although there had been many other less successful ones such as *Demos*, *The Labour Weekly* and *Forwar*, which ran successfully throughout the Edwardian years.

There was **great pride** in these achievements and at the 1914 Easter Conference of the ILP, partly held in St. George's Hall, Bradford. J. H. Palin (president of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants at the time of Taff Vale) stated that

**Of ordinary historical association, Bradford has none. In Domesday book it was described as a waste and successive periods of capitalist**

**exploitation have done little to improve it. The history of Bradford will very largely be the history of the ILP.**

Although this statement was clearly over-exaggerated it did raise the question why had **the ILP emerged so powerfully** in the textile district of the West Riding of Yorkshire? Why was there so much **pride** in the achievements of the ILP and the broader Labour movement in Bradford and the textile belt of the West Riding of Yorkshire.? Why was it that of the 339 delegates from 244 branches of the ILP who attended the 1914 conference that there were 52 representatives for the 24 West Yorkshire branches – 15 from Bradford alone. **Why such success?**

The answer, for such local, municipal and parliamentary success is, I would suggest, based upon a **firm radical base** which was evolving as a result of **industrial changes** and **adapting social values**. There was reflected in an immense number of **inter-locking** and **over-lapping networks** which created a sub-culture which provided the basis, the core, for the broader general support which came from the trade union movement – from the skilled trade unionists, threatened with industrial change, just as much as the previously unorganised unskilled and semi-skilled trade unionists. Both factors – a **core of socialist support with inter-locking and overlapping connections** and the **more general support of trade unionism** were vital to the growth of the Independent Labour Party in West Yorkshire and to the emergence of a powerful LRC/ Labour Party in the twentieth century. What linked them, although not necessarily in a direct sense, was the willingness of the ILP and the new socialist organisation to adapt to the new **radical environment** which **allowed more people (after changes in 1884 and 1894) to vote for a programme of measures (housing, night-soil collection, reductions in the working day and 6d per hour and 48 hours for municipal workers etc) which emerged before the**

formation of the National ILP in January 1893 and through its later programmes. [I am reminded here of the comment that Wilfred Whiteley of Huddersfield/ Colne Valley that ‘He spouted socialism but was returned on the issue of privy middens’. In addition, the comment of Fred Jowett, the first Labour MP for Bradford in 1906, who acknowledged , in his book *The Socialist and the City* (1907) that the ‘socialist could not run ahead of the will of the municipal voter.’”

[There was a belief here held by Jowett and Lansbury and noted by Duncan Tanner in his article ‘Ideological debate in Edwardian labour politics: radicalism, revisionism and socialism’ (Biagini etc) that whilst J. R. MacDonald felt that new social measures/ welfare should emerge within the state that Jowett/Lansbury believed that the working class could run their own affairs.]

**The national debate** into which Labour’s political growth in the West Yorkshire area fits can be easily summarised. In essence, without going into the details of debate and sub-debate, it is a argument between those historians who maintain that Labour’s growth was becoming inevitable before the Great War, as it chipped away at Liberal progressive strength, and those who maintain that the Labour Party’s emergence owes much to the division of the Liberal Party of the Liberal Party and the destruction of its shibboleths during the Great War. On the one hand , there is George Dangerfield, Henry Pelling and Ross McKibbin, maintaining that Labour’s capture of trade union support before the War was vital and, on the other, there is Trevor Wilson, P. F. Clarke, Chris Cook and many others who focus upon then deleterious impact of the Great War of the Liberal Party. They debate the influence of New Liberalism, the

impact of the restricted parliamentary franchise, local evidence and trade-union support.

An alternative, third line, between these two argument put forward by **Bill Lancaster** , who favours the first view, suggests that a more regional approach is desirable and that there may be differences in independent Labour growth and Liberal decline, from area to area. David **Howell** and Duncan **Tanner** have adopted similar approaches, although with a different emphasis.

Although I generally support the view that Labour was making significant headway before 1914 I would accept that there was immense regional variation. In some regions there were good reasons for Labour's **growth** and in others there were good reasons why its growth was **arrested**. For instance, the **Black County** was slower to develop as a Labour heartland than the textile district of the West Riding (West Yorkshire), perhaps because its trade unions were more tied up with the Liberals and the presence of a powerful Unionist tradition.. In contrast **West Yorkshire** was at the forefront of Labour's growth. Was its growth because of (1) **socialist** activists, something which Edward Thompson placed some emphasis upon? Was it because of the accommodation of the working classes in West Yorkshire to (2) **labourist** rather than overtly **socialist** or Marxist perspectives, or was it because of the continuing contribution of (3) **trade unionism** to the emerging radical and socialist perspective. **Or** (4) should we look at why some prominent middle class Liberals were estranged from the emerging socialist emphasis of the new movement in the late nineteenth century.

### **West Yorkshire developments**

Between 1890 and 1914 the independent Labour movement developed rapidly in West Yorkshire. The Bradford Labour Union was formed in May 1891 and had

acquired more than 2,000 members, 19 clubs, and two councillors, by early 1893. It suffered difficulties in the mid 1890s but still had a hard-core of 1,600 ILP members in 1914. The Halifax Labour movement occasionally had up to 800 members but more generally about 600 on the eve of the Great War. Colne Valley Labour Union/League and their branches were less stable. Although there were around 300 members in the mid 1890s ( Clark, p. 110) this figure fell to about 235 in 1899, 83 or so in 1900 before recovering to 122 in 1902. By 1906 the figure was 630 and rising. Keighley and Leeds, for a variety of reasons, were never quite as successful but often had 120 or so members in the early twentieth century, and the Leeds ILP/Labour Party won the parliamentary seat for James O'Grady by 1906. Despite these modest numbers, which did not incorporate all socialists in the West Riding textile district – the ILP and the socialist cultural organisations, kept its support together which maintained the challenge to the Liberal Party and provided the base on a continued appeal to trade union support.

**What shaped the community of the textile district of the West Riding into an increasingly radical and socialist regions? Why did the radical traditions in West Yorkshire become increasingly focused upon political independence and the municipal socialism of the ILP?**

**a) Chartist. Secularist and Socialist connections**

There is no doubt that, as we have already seen today, there had been many expressions of independence in this community in the half century before the ILP emerged. The factory movement, agitation against the New Poor Law, Chartism, the co-operative movement, religious nonconformity and trade unions were all part of the radical traditions which emerged in West Yorkshire. **Yet one should not expect that**

**the baton was handed on from one movement to another. It has been argued that (Stedman Jones) that Chartism owed much to eighteenth-century radicalism and was not necessarily the forerunner of socialism. Edward Thompson noted this in his ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’ (p.. 281-2) when referring to a gathering of Halifax veterans in 1885 in a temperance hotel with George Webber, an old physical force chartist, toasting Mr. Gladstone for his reforms. Ben Wilson, in his *The Struggles of an Old Chartist* (Halifax, 1887), suggested ( p. 40) that ‘The majority of those attending the meeting...have become men of business and in some cases employers of labour.**

A few years later local activist **Fred Pickles** (1885-1907 papers) in Labour History Archive and Study Centre) raised the issue of socialism with **Thomas Cooper (1804-1892)**, the old Leicester Chartist who was then briefly living in Bradford across the road from here, but Cooper suggested that instead of wasting his time with such **socialist schemes** should ‘young man ...you should find something worthwhile in life rather than waste your life on impractical schemes)’ (letter in archive at Manchester)

The fact is that many of the old Chartists in the West Riding did not find a home in socialist organisations such as the ILP. (George White died alone in a Sheffield workhouse in 1868, Isaac Jefferson, Bradford’s Wat Tyler, was active in radical meetings in the 1860s and his son, Cornelius, joined the Bradford Political Union in 1865). **The link between Chartism and the ILP was tenuous to say the least. The same goes for secularism.**

**The local Secularists J. W. Gott, who had helped to form the British Secularist League and became editor of *Truth Seeker*, was a revolutionary socialist but few of his Bradford supporters were active in the emergence Bradford ILP. One of the few prominent one’s who participated was F. Gazeley**



who became an active member of the ILP's East Ward Club in Bradford. James Bartley, a typographer and a Republican who set up a journal called *Demos* for a brief time in the late 1880s, and C. Leonard Robinson were amongst the few republican socialists who emerged in Bradford. Bartley recalled that

In 1872, however, there was not much socialism in Bradford,. I remember a few young forward spirits who met occasionally, in an informal way, in "The Black Bull", an old hostelry situated close to the top of Ivergata...One of their number was a disciple of Louis Blanc [who lectured in Bradford in 1860]....This gentleman made a proposal that a Socialist Society should be formed, but nothing came of it. This was the first suggestion to organise Socialism in Bradford of which I have knowledge. [Bradford T & L Council, *Yearbook*, 1912, p. 67]

Leonard Robinson, however, went back further and 'had imbibed Chartist principles as a boy and was an admirer of Ernest Jones and founder of a Republican club in 1870 [biography of Robinson in Bellamy and Saville etc]

**[The general tenor of this cuts across the views expressed in** Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Read (eds) *Currents of radicalism: Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914* ( CUP, 1991). Their main argument is that there was substantial continuity in popular radicalism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.]

**Instead of Chartism and secularism the real impetus** for socialism in Bradford, and Leeds, seems to have been a lecture by William **Morris**, given on behalf of the SDF on 25 February 1884. He lectured in St. George's Hall ( and didn't like the pea and pie atmospheres . **Stress**). He later wrote to a friend stating that

The Bradford lecture went off very well: a full house and all that but they are a sad set of Philistines there, and it will be a long time before we do anything with them: you see the workmen are pretty comfortable there because all the spinning and weaving is done by women and children: the latter go to the mill at 10 years old for five hours a day as half-timers: I don't think all my vigorous words (of a nature that you may well imagine) shook the conviction of my entertainers that this was the way to make an Earthly Paradise.

In fact he was wrong because Fred Jowett, George Minty and many others were there and, following Morris's formation of the Socialist League, formed a Bradford branch in 1885 which joined with the Leeds branch. There is picture of then – about 20 odd between them – meeting to undertake propaganda and to go on to walks.[**More** about that later but include the picture] Both organisations became active in organising the unorganised , unskilled and semi-skilled workers into trade unions – in the so-called new unionist phase – in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Their activities are presented by Thompson in 'Homage to Tom Maguire', through Maguire, John Lincoln Mahon, Tom Paylor, Alf Mattison, and others, who supported the demand for the eight-hour day, wrote poems and articles of *Commonweal*, the organ of the Socialist League, They were active in organising a gasworkers strike in Leeds (Mattison a young engineer was secretary ), in June-July 1890, the tailoresses strike , in Leeds led by Isabella O. Ford. **In other words, the socialist activity in Bradford, Leeds, Halifax and other parts of the West Riding created the basis of radical and socialist politics. But that was not sufficient in its own right. The socialist activity was probably greatest in Leeds but Leeds was, as Thompson suggested, a case of arrested development probably( (p. 303) because of the continued domination of the Liberal trade unionists on the trades council who contained**

**the ILP until the late 1890s, whereas in Bradford the socialist trade unionists had control of the Bradford trades council from the early 1890s. Socialism by itself was not sufficient.**

b) **Religious influence was also present, if not sufficient. Admittedly** the salvation of the individual soul was probably more important than the 'creation of the kingdom of heaven upon earth' but there was a religious link with the emergent ILP, although the precise relationship is under question. Tony **Jowitt** has argued (article in **Centennial/Rising Sun**) that religious influence, and particularly Congregationalism, underpinned many of the social activities of the ILP. On the other hand Leonard **Smith** (*The ILP and the Churches*) has argued that the link was incidental and dependent upon the influence of prominent individuals, largely from the Congregationalists, Unitarians and the Church of England. Although I would veer to Tony Jowitt's view more than Len Smith (who was a Unitarian student of mine looking a little bit from the perspective of organised religion), it is clear that the link was patchy and subject to change. **Nevertheless, some elements of radical nonconformity were moving to the independent Labour movement.**

A tenuous link was forged between religion and the Labour movement when in 1885 the Rev. Dr. K. C. Anderson, the new pastor at Horton Lane Congregational Church shocked his congregation, which included some of the wealthiest citizens of Bradford, when he stated that **'the socialist indictment against modern society is a true bill; we cannot answer the charge'**. For eight years Anderson pressed his message home to his congregation and attempted to help settle the Manningham Mills dispute. He passed his message on to T. Rhondda Williams, pastor of Greenfield Congregational Chapel. It was Williams who helped form the **Social Reform Union**

in Bradford in 1893 – which brought together about 100 of Bradford’s leading figures – including Rev. Roberts the Congregationalist minister of Frizinghall Chapel-into an organisation who surveyed unemployment and poverty in Bradford in 1894 in league with the ILP.(Bradford Unemployed Emergency Committee, *Report*, 1894). Rhondda Williams was a friend of the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the advocate of the ‘New Theology’ well before Campbell formed his **League of Progressive Religion and Social Thought**. Williams maintained that

‘The truth is that any minister who refuses the advocacy of social reform and confines himself to the work of individual salvation is shirking the crucial problems of modern life.’

Congregationalism carried weight and influence in other areas as well, the Reverend Bryan Dale indeed being involved in the formation a the local Fabian branch in Halifax, along with John Lister, although eh seems to have lost support within the Congregational Union as a result.

There was an analogous movement by Anglicans such as the Rev. W. B. Graham who was active in Bradford socialism and a founder member of the **Church Socialist League**. He was later active in Colne Valley and helped Victor Grayson to his 1097 parliamentary by-election. Graham, who was 6ft 5 inches tall,’ **described himself as 6ft the socialist and 5 inches the parson.** He wrote in the *Forward* ( 25 November 1905) that ‘To me, as many others, Socialism seems a logical outcome of our Lord’s teaching as applied to the modern democratic state.’ There was also substantial support and sympathy from other Anglicans such as Father Bull and the priests at the House of the Resurrection at Mirfield, just outside Huddersfield, who gathered along with 200 Anglican ministers to send a signed letter if congratulations to the Labour Party/LRC on the 29 seats it won at the 1906 general election.

In addition, many leading figures of the local Labour movement were Congregationalist or Unitarians. W. H. Drew, who led the Manningham Mills strike, was a Congregationalist as was Fred Jowett, Bradford's first Labour MP, who attended the Horton Lane Congregational Chapel. Yet they carried little influence with the Yorkshire Congregational Union, the Rev. Bryan Dale and Rhondda Williams also being shunned by them. Many Congregationalists such as James Hill, who was an important big businessman in Bradford, was opposed to the ILP, and Walter Sugden and W. P. Byles, owner of the *Bradford Observer*, were more interested in forming a new progressive alliance between the Labour and Liberal parties.

Yet religion did inspire many Labour activists to attempt to improve their local environment. They might live the life of a socialist but many, like Fred Jowett, were driven to work for municipal socialism. Jowett wrote *The Socialist and the City* (1907), a pamphlet in which he argued that the future must grow from the present and that the purpose was to bring municipal institutions into harmony with the social gospel which he preaches in accordance with his conviction.' [Also this reflects the radical emphasis of the new ILP.] D. B. Foster, a Leeds ILPer. Felt that after his conversion to socialism that Bunyan's 'City of God' was a possibility. Once elected to Leeds City Council 'The Town Hall became to me the house of God. The city became to me the household of God.' (D. B. Foster, *Socialism and The Christ: my two great discoveries in a long search for Truth* (Leeds, 1921).pp. 27 and 59).

c) **Socialist activists** and **religious** support provided a contest for the ILP's growth but were not sufficient in themselves. What then of the obvious influence of the many **wealthy supporters** which the local ILP gathered to it. There is surviving an

undertaking in 1895 at which prominent individuals undertook to underwrite the costs of the ILP in the 1895 general election with the Halifax Joint Stock bank. (**Illustration**). It was organised by John Lister, the first treasurer of the ILP, He was the owner of Shibden Hall in Halifax, a wealthy landowner, a close friend of Edward Carpenter, a Liberal who joined Labour, an Anglican who became a Catholic. He provided the local ILP with substantial sums of money which he discounted over the years. He was its great benefactor and James **Keir Hardie** wrote in *Labour Leader*, ‘**That all the gangral elements of the Labour movement descended upon Shibden Hall, much to the disgust of the Butler.**’

Others in that group include France **Littlewood**, a woollen manufacturer/merchant from Colne Valley, and also Arthur **Priestman**, a Quaker, who with his brother, H. B. **Priestman**, ran one of the largest textile manufacturing businesses in Bradford. In 1906, when Fred **Jowett** was returned for Labour in Bradford West, Arthur became Labour leader in Bradford at the same time that his brother was the Liberal leader. On his death in 1918 his Liberal obituary writers could not work out why he supported Labour except for his genuine concern for humanity. In the case of John Lister he was concerned about the environment and had been influenced by William Morris’s lectures whilst at Oxford.

d) **Cultural** and **social** factors were also important. James **Hinton**, and other historians, have played down the importance of cultural and social factors in the evolution of the early Labour movement – seeing them as a small niche in its development. This view was challenged by Fred Reid in his various writings on socialist Sunday schools and the Labour Church movement, as did Edward Thompson in his book on *William Morris*. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Stephen **Yeo** felt the

need to attach 'The Religion of Socialism' (*History Workshop*, 1977) with the emergence of William Morris as a socialist in 1883 and his death in 1896. He was attacked because of his views that the development of election machines in municipal elections in the mid 1890s killed off the commitment to living the life of a socialist and suggested that socialist Sunday schools, Labour churches and club life declined at this point. He was attacked, with some justice, for suggesting that the living of the life of a socialist declined rapidly in the 1890s. It was pointed out that whilst Labour churches disappeared quickly that socialist Sunday schools, ILP clubs and the Clarion movement continued to prosper until the Great War. Yeo defended himself in an article in the early 1980s entitled 'Towards making more of a moment than spirit'. (J. A. Jowitt and R. K. S. Taylor (eds), *Bradford 1890-1914: The Cradle of the ILP*, U. of Leeds, Adult & Education & Extramural Studies, Bradford Occasional Papers, no.2, 1980). This statement, written by James Keir Hardie in the *Labour Leader* of 15 October 1898, reflects that Hardie was asking the ILPers to be practical and to organise and win elections rather than just to rely upon the living of the life of a socialist. To Yeo this was part of the process of moving away from the spirit of socialism to the pragmatism of municipal and parliamentary politics.

In the textile district of Yorkshire it is clear that the cultural side of the movement, and the religion of socialism, survived quite healthily beyond the mid 1890s. **The Labour churches** emerged in Bradford, Leeds, Keighley and other centres in the early 1890s offering their Sunday morning lectures and rather eclectic meetings later in the day which gathered around a speaker a variety of religious and secular forms. The movement soon declined, John Trevor its founder soon departed and *the Labour Prophet*, its organ, began to decline by the turn of the century. The Leeds and Bradford Labour churches were forced to unite at the turn of the century. However, the

socialist Sunday schools which had first emerged in the early 1890s, did not begin until 1895.

**Socialist Sunday Schools**, originally established in Battersea, and then in Glasgow often grew as a result of the Labour churches, although they were in fact independent of that movement and long survived it. Indeed, there were five regional unions by 1909 – Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Lancashire and Cheshire and Yorkshire and in 1913 Tyneside was added.

The West Yorkshire area was well organised. *Young Socialist* in 1916 indicated schools 6 in Bradford (Central, East Bowling, East, Great Horton, Heaton and Manningham – West Bowling seems to have gone), one at Brighouse and Halifax, three in Huddersfield at Central, Lockwood and Paddock, Kirkheaton had one, Leeds had four (Central, East, North West, South, West) and there was Wakefield. Developed from other Nonconformist groups with their Sunday schools. Development of The Socialist Ten Commandments and The Socialist Precepts.. They were a summary of what Labour/ socialists stood for. (Look briefly at what it stood for).

ILP/Labour Union/ **Socialist clubs** expanded rapidly throughout the 1890s and the Edwardian years. There is something of a local debate here though. **David Clark, now Lord Clark of Windermere**, wrote a book on the early history of the Colne Valley Labour constituency in 1982 [interestingly called *Colne Valley: From Radicalism to Socialism* (1982)] He argued that it was club life and the social aspect of Labour's activities, not trade unionism, that kept the Labour movement going in Colne until the enormous success of Victory Grayson in 1907 pushed the movement forward. I agree with him but suggest that whilst trade unionism was weak there everyone who was a socialist and could be a trade unionist was so (eg. George Garside). I might also add that it was the ILP which took over the radical agenda.]



David James in his book on Keighley Labour said much the same, although I would make the same observation. Even in Bradford, the 19 clubs and 2,000 members, of the early 1890s, although they were later reduced in number, provided the base for Labour success. They engendered a spirit of unity in the movement and worked closely together and competed with each other, for instance, in the annual cricket contest for the **Fattorini Shield**. By the Great War the ILP had its own cinema (Morley street). There was a powerful club movement in Halifax, which also had its own socialist cafe. In Colne Valley, after the parliamentary by-election success of Victory Grayson in 1907 every village had its own socialist club.

The **Clarion** movement, formed by Robert Blatchford in Manchester in 1891, was well established in Bradford, Halifax and Keighley. **Montague Blatchford**, ‘**Mont Blong**’ was active in promoting its development in Halifax, and Philip Snowden did much for its activities in Keighley. It was powerfully present in Bradford and Colne Valley. Without going into the details it promoted fellowship and brotherhood through the Clarion glee clubs, the Clarion Van movement, the Clarion Scouts and the Clarion cyclists. Snowden, in his *Autobiography* (1934) was later to famously recall the cycling and propaganda trips where cyclists would stop off near fields and **attach to the backsides of cows posters proclaiming socialism the hope of the world**.

Yet in the end what gave the West Yorkshire labour movement its political success was the growing senses of anti-Liberalism and its ability **to tap into trade union support** through policies such as the eight-hour day, 6d per hour, 48 hour weeks and the other demands of trade unions. It is these policies which attracted the mass support which projected the ILP/Labour Party forward.

e) The reason for this, I think, was a wider range of discontent that was developing in the late nineteenth century textile community of West Yorkshire. There was certainly an **anti-Liberalism** developing as well as a small, but frustrated, trade union movement. Anti-liberalism was becoming increasingly evident as the Liberal Party in West Yorkshire, dominated by the likes of Alfred Illingworth and the relatively **intransigent right-wing millocracy** who refused to acknowledge the radical issues of removing half-time pupils from the system, failed to acknowledge the need for new measures to deal with the unemployed or to tackle the issues of school feeding to deal with poverty.

. In the textile district of the West Riding the Liberals normally won 19 of the 23 seats from the mid 1880s onwards. They normally dominated the town councils of Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Keighley and Leeds and normally dominated the school boards and the board of guardians in these towns. The Liberal organisations were so powerful locally that they were disdainful of the working-class. In Bradford they rejected the attempt by the Bradford Trades Council to put forward their secretary/ president Samuel Shaftoe, a good Liberal, to stand for the municipal seat of West Bowling in Bradford. He was put forward on several occasions, and turned down in 1888, the year that the TUC annual meeting was held in Bradford, in favour of an unfair employer, one who did not pay trade union wages –**Martin Field**, a printer. Shaftoe described himself ‘ as the most kicked about football in Bradford politics.’ Yet whilst he remained faithful to the Liberal Party many of his supporters did not. Elsewhere, France Littlewood, a small merchant who later became a treasurer to the ILP, became frustrated with the Liberals who brought in Sir James Kitson to contest Colne Valley without his going through the proper selection process – he had previously secured a seat for Herbert Gladstone in Leeds and this was seen as his

reward. Such Liberal attitudes means that when the Bradford Labour Union/ ILP was formed in May 1891 Alfred Illingworth, the Bradford manufacturer and MP, suggested that 'This was merely one of those breezes which occasionally crosses Bradford.' (Intransigence of Illingworth. Egyptian tomb in Undercliffe Cemetery in 1907)

There was also the case of William Pollard Byles. Owner, and sometime editor of the *Bradford Observer*, he was a radical Liberal who supported the case of the workers at Manningham Mills in 1890-1, fought with the support of Shipley Trades Council and against the owners of Saltaire Mills (Charles Stead etc) to secure the Liberal candidature for Shipley in 1892, which he lost as a result of Liberal collusion with the Unionist candidate in the 1895 general election. In 1896 he failed to become the compromise Liberal Radical candidate in the parliamentary by-election for Bradford East and eventually left Bradford politics to seek his fortunes in the more conducive political air of Manchester in 1903. The *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, a right-wing Liberal paper owned by Alfred Illingworth and his friends, included an obituary for his departure:

He has affluence, he has leisure, and he has ambition,. That other desideratum troops of friends' is denied him, or at least if he has troops his enemies are in battalions. Owing to untoward circumstances, Mr.Byles's career was so circumscribed here in Bradford that it became intolerable. To find greater space, and ampler air, he had at the age of 64 to expatriate himself, to leave all his friends and associations behind to live in Manchester. It is a hard fate but it is necessary if Mr. Byles should fulfil the political role to which he is irresistibly drawn. [*Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1903]

Then the real abuse begins with the suggestion that he you couldn't be in a room with him for five minutes without he disagreeing with you, that 'Dame Nature' should be blamed for his unfortunate manner. Finally it concluded that his wife was very nice and agreeable!

The final straw, and perhaps the parting of the ways for many Liberals, radicals, independent Labour supporters and socialists was the **parliamentary by-election in Bradford in November 1896**. This came at a time when independence Labour was facing its worst years. It had done badly in the 1895 general election –described as the most expensive funeral since that of Napoleon- when it lost its only MP in **James Keir Hardie** in West Ham South. There was discussion of a possible union of socialist forces at this time, which Hardie opposed. And then an opportunity for a radical alliance emerged in Bradford. Normally the three parliamentary seats in Bradford were won by Liberals but in the 1895 general election the Conservatives won all three seats and sent the Liberals 'to the bottom of the deep blue sea' returning Ernest Flower, Byron Reed and the Marquis of Lorne (the Liberals having previously described them as 'A **broken Reed**, a **wilting Flower** and a Marquis of Forlone' Byron Reed died and left the Bradford East seat vacant. For a time it looked as though **Hardie** would be the only progressive candidate to face the Tory candidate. However, at the last minute, **Alfred Illingworth** found a Liberal candidate, thus breaking the possibility of Hardie effectively being the sole radical candidate and picking up Liberal votes. He brought in Alfred Billson and there was a cartoon in *The Clarion* which depicted Billson being dragged from Forster Street Railway station by the scruff of his neck. The *Clarion* commented wryly that

The two most important events of the week are the discovery of a sea serpent off Lowestoft and the discovery of a Liberal candidate for Bradford. They are

both said to be remarkably fine specimens – the serpent being quite three hundred yards, or feet, long, and about as big round as an elephant. The Liberal candidate is not so large round as that, though quite big enough for the Emergency. He was landed also, after some trouble, whereas the other curiosity escaped. (*The Clarion*, 7 November 1896.)

In the wake of the contest the *Daily Chronicle* (quoted in the *Labour Leader*, 21 November 1896) stated, appositely, that

Liberalism in Bradford had been doomed to failure because for years it took no account of Labour. The people of Bradford were expected to return to Parliament, and to take their political orders from them. **Illingworthism** is a gospel without sympathy, comradeship, or hope for the Bradford worker, and an attempt to identify it with Liberalism has had its consequence in **Keir Hardiesm**.

f) Although a growing sense of anti- Liberalism, and the end of an old radical alliance, was , obviously, not exclusively associated with trade unionism there was a sense in which trade unions were the ones who took greatest umbrage at the actions of the Liberal Party. The **Bradford Society of Typographers, which represented** the best paid craftsmen in the town, many of whom were Conservative or Liberal, were upset at the **Martin Field** affair which I have just mentioned and moved towards support for an independent Labour movement when the were faced with the threat of the Thorne composing machine being introduced and with the conflict at Manningham Mills in 1890/1. The Silk Spinners' Union in Halifax were upset when their independent labour representatives – James Beever (an old Liberal) and James Tattersall were victimised by the firm of Clayton, Murgatroyd and Co. This action immediately galvanised the independent political Labour movement in Halifax.

The fact is that the speeding up of textile machinery in the late nineteenth century – combing machinery being speeded up 30 per cent or more and the weavers working three looms between two weavers rather than two,- plus new machinery, and increasing industrial conflict began to detach working-class support from the Liberal Party towards the new independent Labour movement that was emerging. There had been a major textile conflict in Huddersfield and area in 1884 but the **Manningham Mills** strike brought together the regional and local tensions in textile and trade unionism as never before. There is much written on it but briefly Samuel Cunliffe Lister, faced with the loss of his American markets due to the McKinley Tariffs, imposed wage cuts of 17 to 33 per cent upon his workforce. Eventually, between December 1890 and April 1891, 5,000 workers were locked out or struck, their strike meetings interfered with and troops were called out to maintain order and the Riot Act read. It brought together trade unionist of all persuasions and occurred at a time when trade union membership nationally and locally was expanding rapidly ( 3,500 in Bradford in 1886 to about 13,500 in 1893). This was perceived to be naked class warfare. [*The Labour Journal*, 7 October 1892 wrote that ‘In the Lister strike, the people of Bradford saw plainly, as they had never seen before, that whether their rulers are Liberal or Tory they are capitalists first and politicians afterwards.’]

The Bradford Labour Union was conceived in the frustrations of working men affected by Manningham. Dispute . Charlie Glyde said ‘We have had two parties in the past, the can'ts and the won'ts, and it is now time we had a party that will.’ The Bradford Labour Union was formed in May 1891. Very quickly, it captured the support of the Bradford Trades Council for Ben Tillett's candidature of Bradford West \*against Illingworth) in 1892. In 1900 the BTC and the Bradford ILP were united in election policies through the Municipal Election Committee and from 1902-

1916 through the Workers' Municipal Federation. Although a formal member of the first arrangement the ILP did not affiliate with the WMF, although most of the BTC representatives were members of the ILP and from 1905 onwards the WMF did the election work for both WMF and ILP candidates. Halifax also developed a similar arrangement. In **essence** this allowed **for a broader electoral policy to encompass all shades of trade union opinion** with the ILP/ Labour cause.

One might reflect briefly upon other factors.

#### g) Women

Jill Liddington, in her recent book *Rebel Girls*, has stressed how the Women's Social and Political Union carried significant support within the West Yorkshire Labour and socialist community. (p. 107) Over 500 ILP women signed the *Manifesto to the Women's Social and Political Union* published at New Year 1907. Of these 136 came from the West Riding of Yorkshire and another 146 from Lancashire,.... And of the fifty-eight WSPU branches now sprung up across the country, almost a quarter lay in Yorkshire – mainly within the West Riding towns.' For such Pennine textile communities in northern England were *the* heartland of early WSPU support. Their very names – Halifax and Hebden Bridge, Bradford and Keighley, Leeds and Dewsbury – conjured up countless bales of wool, the racket of looms, the whirr of sewing machines'. (Reference to Dora Thewlis, -baby suffragette' from Huddersfield).

#### h) Socialist Unity

One might also reflect that the strength of the ILP in West Yorkshire textile community meant that even at its weakest the socialist unity campaign of the mid 1890s never really took off – the Bradford ILP with more than 1,000 members in 1897 and 1898 not wanting to join with the 23 members of the SDF at that time. The later

attempt to form the British Socialist Party, pressed forward by Victory Grayson from 1911 onwards captured some general support in the textile district of the West Riding, and most obviously the ILP in Colne Valley Labour League (formed in 1899). But the CVLL never paid its dues and drifted out of the BSP, which affiliated to the Labour Party in 1916. **Without going into the details of this** it is clear that it was the ethical and radical issues which appealed to those who supported Labour in the textile district of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Perhaps it was the sense of community which blocked out the broader approach.

### **Conclusion**

The development of the independent Labour movement in the textile district of the West Riding of Yorkshire drew upon many factors to create the **interlinking and overlapping community spirit** which shaped it into a heartland for Labour's growth before the Great War. There may have been old radical sentiments at play, there was clearly religious influences, cultural forces, anti-Liberalism, socialist activists acting as a core and other factors. Nevertheless, it was **trade unionism**, accreting to a core of hard-line socialist support, which appears to have created the successful independent Labour movement in this area, driven on by the indifference and **intransigence** of right-wing Liberalism – **Illingworthism** which was increasingly out of tune with the new radicalism that was emerging.

I would, therefore, like to finish with two quotes. One is from the Bradford ILP paper *Forward* (13 January 1906) which, following Fred Jowett's parliamentary victory in Bradford West against a Conservative candidate and the Liberal nominee W. Claridge published a poem which was a sharp reminder of Liberal neglect and Labour advance.

A plausible weaver named Claridge



One sought for West Bradford in marriage,

But was left in the lurch,

She would not go to Church,

In Alfred Illingworth's carriage.

And finally, Fred Jowett, who was returned as MP in 1906, wrote up his memories in *What made me a Socialist* (Glasgow, 1941). Reflecting upon his early socialist meetings he wrote(p. 10)

‘These meetings were occasions for drawing together the two small groups of Socialists in Leeds and Bradford, where branches of the old Socialist League had been formed. There were less than a dozen members in the Bradford branch, and I became one of them. Although weak in numbers, we were strong in faith.

Sometime in the summer time, the joint forces of Leeds and Bradford Socialism tramped together to spread the gospel by printed and spoken word in neighbouring villages. And at eventide, on the way home, as we walked in country lane or on river bank, we sang

“What is this, the sound and rumour? What is this that all men hear. Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near. Like the rolling on of the ocean in the eventide of fear?

‘Tis the people marching on.”

And we believed they were.

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The ILP in the West Yorkshire, if not socialism itself, was becoming the new radicalism.

# **The Rising Sun of Socialism: The emergence of the Labour Movement in the textile belt of the West Riding of Yorkshire**

Keith Laybourn

Brief points for lecture 14 April 2007-04-07

## **Introduction**

E.P. Thompson's seminal article 'Homage to Tom Maguire' reminded readers of the value of provincial and regional history in interpreting national history and stressed the importance of the North (and the West Riding of Yorkshire) in the growth of the Independent Labour Party/ Labour Party. Whilst the Manningham Mills strike (1890-1) has been seen as the cause of ILP growth, Thompson argued that earlier disputes and socialist activists, such as Tom Maguire, were important factors in this growth although this had much to do with the textile community of the West Riding of Yorkshire where there was considerable municipal success and parliamentary success for the ILP between the 1890s and 1914. There were, however, other factors at play such as the development of a local Labour press, including the *Bradford Pioneer* and *The Leeds Weekly Citizen*, cultural and social factors, anti-Liberalism and trade unionism. The ILP was formed as a national organisation at Bradford, at St. George's Hall and the Labour rooms at Peckover Street, in January 1893, At its 'coming of age; conference ' at Easter 1914, held at St. George's Hall, Bradford, J. H. Palin stated that

Of ordinary historical association Bradford has none. In Domesday Book It was described as a waste and successive periods of capitalist exploitation have done little to improve it. The history of Bradford will very largely be the history of the ILP.

This statement is clearly an exaggeration but it is clear that a radical and socialist base had developed in West Yorkshire in which there were overlapping and inter-locking networks between religious, anti-Liberal, radical and socialist groups who provided the base for the more general, and often independent, support of trade unionism. In this changing climate it was the ILP, of not socialism, which best represented the new radicalism.

This development fits into the **national debate** in which some historians of Labour history (G. D. H. Cole, George Dangerfield, Henry Pelling and Ross McKibbin) have argued that Labour was developing rapidly before the Great War, often because of its association with trade unionism and others, mainly historians of Liberal Party history (including Trevor Wilson, Michael Bentley, Chris Cook) who argue that the Liberal Party was run down '**by the rampant omnibus of war**'. In recent years the debate has moved towards regional and local and regional studies {in books produced by Bill Lancaster ( on Leicester), David Howell and Duncan Tanner. Howell tends to suggest significant development in his book *The British Workers and the Independent* whilst Tanner's book *Political Change and the Labour Party* tends to play down the development of Labour up to the Great War.' There are currently many sub-debates about the franchise, New Liberalism and many other factors. What I will argue that is that there were many regions, and the textile district of West

Yorkshire was one, where Labour was making big inroads into Liberal support before the Great War.

The textile district of the West Riding (West Yorkshire) was at the forefront of Labour's growth but was it because of socialist activists, labourist compromises or because of trade unionism.

### **West Riding of Yorkshire**

a) Chartist, secularist and socialist connections. Whilst there was some continuity between Chartism and the demand for independent Labour action, and indeed between secularism and the ILP, it appears that the majority of old Chartists did not support or join the ILP and socialist groups. Ben Wilson suggests this in *The Struggles of an Old Chartist* (Halifax, 1887) and when Fred Pickles, a Bradford socialist, contains in his papers (1885-1907) a reply from Thomas Cooper about his socialist schemes suggesting 'young man...you should find something useful in life rather than waste you life on impractical schemes.' The same can be suggested for secularists, with the exception of J. W. Gott and F. Gazeley. This throws into doubt the views of Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair Reid (eds), *Currents of Radicalism* etc (1991). Although there was a Republican club at the Black Bull, Ivegate, Bradford, in 1872 (according to C. Leonard Robinson) it is clear that the **William Morris** encouraged the formation of Socialist League branches in both Leeds and Bradford lecture of 25 February 1884. These included George Minty, Fred Jowett (in 1906 ILP/Labour MP for Bradford West), Tom Paylor, John Lincoln Mahon, Alf Mattison and others. These members became active in organising the tailoresses strike in Leeds (June/July 1890), the Leeds municipal strike etc.

b) Religious influence was also present is tenuous, transmitting some Nonconformist radicalism to the new ILP through the Social Reform Union and the Bradford Unemployed Emergency Committee in 1894. But historians have debates how much religious influence there really was in West Yorkshire. Tony Jowitt felt that it was pervasive within the new independent Labour movement whilst Les Smith has suggested that the link was incidental and dependent upon the influence of prominent individuals. I tend to support Tony Jowitt, although one must acknowledge that the Rev. Dr. K. C. Anderson (Horton Lane Congregational Church), the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams (Cong.), the Rev. Bryan Dale (Cong) and Rev. W. B. Graham (C of E), the Rev. Father Bull (C of E at House of the Resurrection at Mirfield) were relatively isolated individuals. There was **certainly a social reform/ municipal mission** emerging amongst the churches. And D. B. Foster, of the Leeds ILP, felt that 'The Town Hall became to me the house of God. The city became to me the household of God.' (*Socialism and the Christ: my two great discoveries in a long search for Truth* (Leeds, 1921))

c) Wealthy supporters such as Philip Snowden, France Littlewood and Arthur Priestman were also important.

d) Cultural and social factors were also important, despite the suggestion of James Hinton that they were a fissure or a small niche in the development of the Labour movement. Stephen Yeo in his 'Religion of Socialism' article (*History Workshop*, 1977) suggested that the Labour church, socialist Sunday schools, clubs, etc. were

important but only between about 1883 and 1896, when William Morris was an active socialist. Hereafter they declined as the desire to win municipal and parliamentary elections took over. In fact ILP clubs continued to prosper, only fully developing in Colne Valley during the Edwardian age, socialist Sunday schools were only just developing, the Clarion movement/ cycling clubs were only just developing by the mid 1890s, although the Labour Church was already beginning its rapid decline.. David Clark, in *Colne Valley : From Radicalism to Socialism* , suggested that it was the cultural side of the movement that sustained the ILP in Colne Valley. Although I would note that weak as trade unionism was most of those who could be trade unionists in the movement were.

e) Anti-Liberalism developed as the agenda changes and the Liberal Party seemed unwilling to take on the newly emerging radical agenda.. They were unwilling to admit working men to the political process ( e.g. . Martin Field case in Bradford), Alfred Illingworth was the unbending face of right-wing Liberalism, and there was the problem of how the Liberal Party treated Liberal Radicals such as William Pollard Byles ( sometimes owner and editor of the *Bradford Observer*/) When he left Bradford his political obituary in the *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1903, was more than abusive suggesting that ;his enemies are in battalions'. The failure of the Liberal Radical alliance with Labour was seen in the Bradford East parliamentary by-election of 1896 in which Keir Hardie was thwarted by Illingworth in his attempt to become the Radical candidate.. Thereafter it was felt that 'Illingworthism' had bred 'Keir Hardieism' and Labour was certainly committed to removing 'yellow and blur Tories without ruth or remorse'.

g) Trade Unionism was slow to emerge in the West Riding textile industry and the Liberals generally ignored it, as in the case of Samuel Shaftoe and the Bradford Trades Council. This indifference was reflected in the Manningham Mills strike of 1890/1. Trade unionists and workers began to appreciate the message of Robert Blatchford (Nunquam) who once wrote that 'You cannot give political support to someone who economically opposes you.' In addition, the New Liberalism, which added social reform to the issue of Home Rule, was no solution for trade unionists who wanted support rather than an independent stance based upon notions of harmony and compromise. Taff Vale, in many ways, was the final straw.

h) Women. Look at Jill Liddington's recent book *Rebel Girls* which indicates the large support which ILP women in the West Riding gave to the Women's Social and Political Union.

i) Socialist Unity, because of the ILP capture of local socialist and independent support, was never a realistic proposition in an area where the Social Democratic Federation carried little support whether in the mid 1890s or just before the beginning of the Great War. It was only Victor Grayson's influence which gained any significant support for the British Socialist Party in this area on the eve of war. Indeed it was only the Colne Valley Labour League which joined the BSP as an organisation, although it failed to pay its fees.

## Conclusion

It is clear that the textile area of the West Riding became a Labour stronghold, indeed heartland, before the Great War. It did so as a result of an interlinking and overlapping set of factors which created a hardcore of socialist support which was able to capture the more general support of the trade unions through its reformation, in some senses, of radicalism which the intransigent Liberal leadership were able to

contemplate. This was reflected by the ILP poet who wrote a poem upon Fred Jowett's parliamentary victory in Bradford West in 1906, when W. Claridge, the Illingworth nominee was defeated. It is also reflected in the spirit of the hard core of socialists, of the Socialist League, who Fred Jowett joined in the mid 1880s.